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ORIENTAL RUGS AND CARPETS.

A SERIES OF ARTICLES—No. 1.

BY W. L. D. O'GRADY.

FIVE years ago the beautiful Oriental rugs and carpets now so much esteemed here were practically unknown among us. Some travelled Americans had seen them in the Levant or India, and a few were brought home as curiosities. They were not, however, considered suitable for actual use. Even the English who have so long occupied India, and in the cool table land of Mysore or the hill stations of the Neilgherries or Himalahs, used them as necessary comforts, never thought of bringing them home to decorate British rooms. Carpets were cut to fit rooms with all sorts of angles, and Oriental foot cloths with their rich borders were certainly not adapted for such mutilation. But things have changed. The revival of architecture and interior decoration has led to closer inquiry into everything that may add to the beauty of our homes, and the intrinsic merits of Eastern work have at last been fully recognized. One great characteristic is common to all Oriental rugs—except some of recent make, many of which have been sophisticated by a too greedy response to the great demand for them—fast coloring. Nowadays, a great deal of rubbish is turned out with aniline dyes, applied as dexterously by Osmanli or mild Hindu as by their imitators in Paris, Glasgow or New England. This unfading color, the harmony of design and general durability with other good qualities, have made the work of the patient Eastern weaver something to be eagerly sought after. And from indulging in rugs, there is a tendency to add other Orientalisms. The Moresque has become a favorite style, and has in its manifold forms begun to tinge our architecture very perceptibly. In our handsomest new mansions is often to be found a modest library in the Persian taste, or a boudoir that might befit a *hanoum* of Stamboul, and one of the latest temples of music, the Casino, is decidedly suggestive of the palaces of half forgotten heroes of Hindustan at Ajmere or Digh.

With all this, there is a surprising amount of ignorance current as to the histories and characteristics of Oriental rugs. They have for the most part been collected, on strictly commercial principles, by keen traders, who probably troubled themselves very little at first with the geography of the places of their origin, or their antecedents in any way, and they are displayed at retail by dapper salesmen who state what little they do know about them at second-hand. People with taste enough to enjoy the masterpieces of the Eastern looms naturally would like to know something of the history of the goods they admire. The gathering of such information and possession of such knowledge certainly adds zest to the pleasure of selection, and it must be a little disappointing for a student of antique Daghestans to be gravely informed by some callow youth with knowledge confined to prices and discounts, that the choice specimens offered for inspection were made in India, and obtained their unparalleled sheen by camels having been stabled on them. We have also heard that Daghestan is a plain in Tartary and that Kurde rugs came from Southern India! It may be interesting to dispel some of these remarkable notions, and give something of a correct idea of the main varieties of rugs now in our market, their characteristics, and relative desirability.

In texture, Oriental rugs, as a rule, even of the finest kinds, are comparatively coarse, but they are very durable. Some are in existence in splendid condition after authenticated constant use for centuries, and, in spite of time, they have retained with pristine splendor the brilliancy of their hues. The backing of nearly all is of cotton, and some rugs are made almost entirely of cotton. Wool, however, and mainly wool of the finest kind is the textile employed for the surface. It may surprise a great many people to learn that there are over thirty distinct varieties, and between the coarse Kurde or Coula and the superb Bokhara rug, may be found at least as many different prices. Mostly Oriental rugs are sold by the square foot, even at retail, with the choicest, though job lots of "culls" are sometimes worked off at so much a rug when a clearance of rubbish is devised by some enterprising importer, and, of course, they are then sold at auction, where the moth-eaten and ragged find an ignominious end.

There is a wonderful difference in rugs from the same locality, and with the same general appearance. Invariably the fruit of hand labor, they

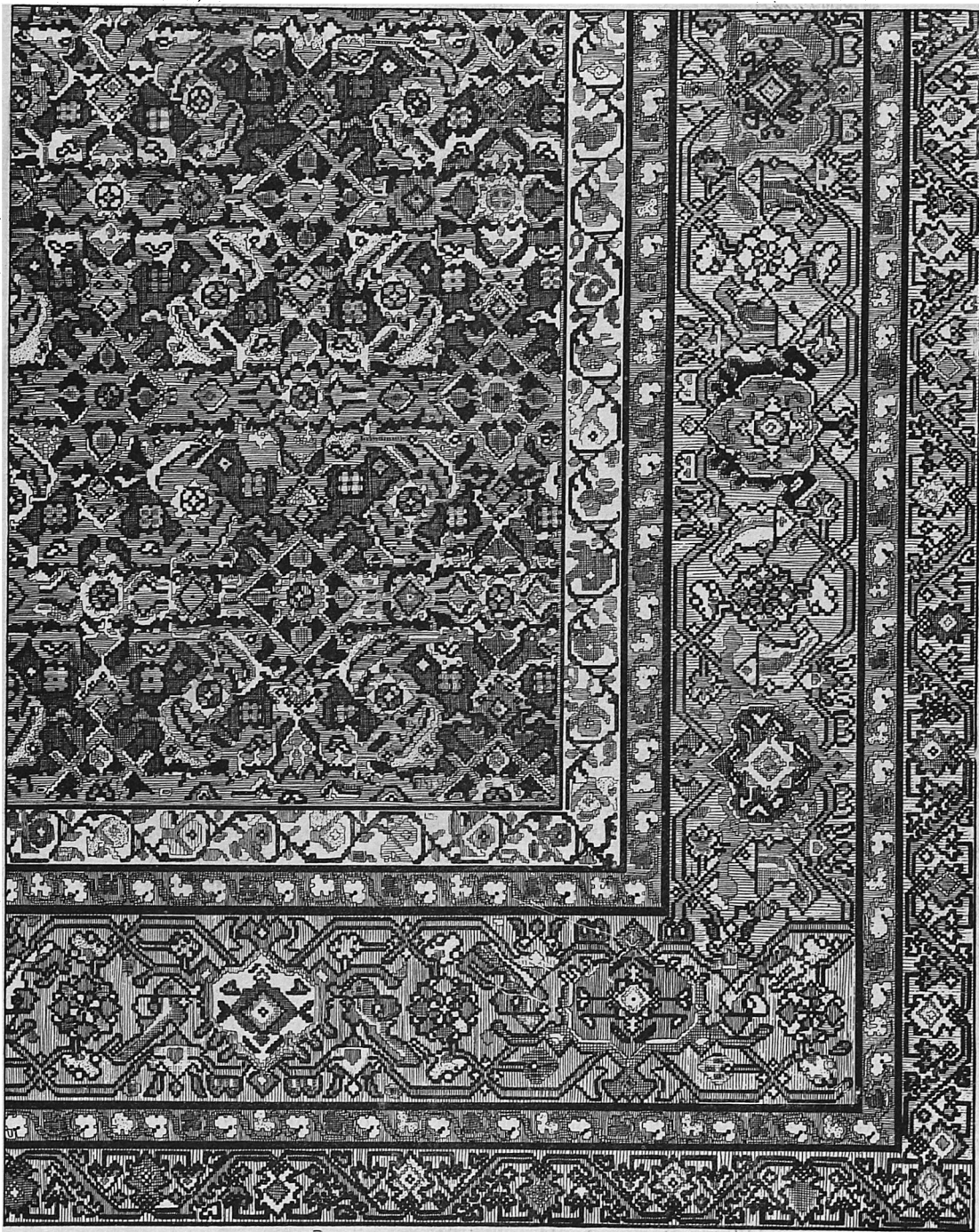
by turning out as much work as Oriental indolence will permit, which, however, is counteracted, more than many people would suppose, by their diligent plodding for long hours. Then the free labor of the hereditary artisan, who takes pride in perpetuating the prestige of good work enjoyed for ages by his ancestors, gives far better results than the forced drudgery of the convict. There is the same difference, even in the dyes, between the rugs made for home use and those made for sale, as between the house a millionaire builds for a home-stead and the block run up for speediest possible disposal by a speculative builder. The moon-eyed Zuleika probably employs one hundred and fifty different shades of the primary colors for the little gem she makes, some of the carefully chosen fibres being in soak for weeks till the dye becomes thoroughly incorporated; while Cassim, the weaver, in a press of work, spares little time for such refinements, and indulges in no such tender conceits of contrasting tints, and when under the stress of the impatient Frank, with long purse and a disagreeable aptitude for screwing down his prices to the lowest notch, he does not disdain to use the

coal tar substitutes for the ancestral secrets of his calling, and congratulates himself on getting the best of the Giaour in his bargain.

THE nomenclature of furniture has a variety as great as that of colors, and the establishment of an exchange, such as was suggested in these columns recently, to govern the disposals of titles to styles, might be considered in connection with the cabinet makers art as well as that of the dyer.

Grecian, Roman and Pompeian forms are claimed for modern furniture, much of which bears but little resemblance to the designs its name would lead one to suppose it reproduced. This, however, is not so serious as one might imagine, for the reason that the purchaser is often as little acquainted with what it should be, as is the manufacturer.

There has been a plethora supply of antique models, classic shapes, and all sorts of early historic patterns, and now the tendency appears to reach up a little closer to modern civilization, beginning with the Byzantine, tending toward the Renaissance, developing the beauties of Sassanian and discovering the attractions of the Celtic. The furniture and architecture of the Druids, the Norsemen and the American Indians are believed to be the only styles that have not been thoroughly exhausted, but it is doubtful how much longer these nations will escape the universal draught.



EXAMPLE OF A PERSIAN CARPET.

betray the individuality of the maker, or makers, for some have evidently occupied the spare hours of many deft workers. As in their courtly bowers the dames and demoiselles of the days of chivalry plied the busy needle in tapestry, so in Tartar *kibitka* or Tunisian harem, the ladies and their attendants kill time in the manufacture of rugs and portières.

Many an interesting romance could be written were some of these rugs gifted with the means of communication with some smart interviewer. Even in this brief account, mention may be made of some genuine stories connected with some famous rugs. There is naturally considerable difference between the feminine delicacy and taste displayed by the refined inmates of a wealthy home, and the rude efforts of the single spouse of some poor porter, who, good man, must needs have his prayer rug, as well as his betters. There is also to be expected a difference between such a labor of love, and the monotonous work undertaken by a professional carpet weaver, whose interest is best served

Among highly prized decorative objects of the Jarves Italian collection in the Foreign Exhibition in Boston are an iron inkstand inlaid with gold, of the XVIIIth century; various pieces of the Cellini style of work by different artists of the XVIth and XVIIth century of German fabrication and a famous piece; and a drinking cup of Matheus Corvinus King of Hungary of the XVth century, a beautiful work set with gems, with head of that sovereign, and representing his principal victories. One of the acknowledged beautiful examples of Lucadella Robbio is shown in the form of a Madonna and Child in a tabernacle, and one hundred pieces of majolica ware are reproductions of Master Giorgio's masterpieces.

NOTHING adds so much to the attractiveness of a dainty piece of china as delicate tinting, if it is successfully done. A tea-set of plain white china can be so metamorphosed by a little skillful painting as to make it worth more than twice its original value.